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THE FLIGHT OF THE HOURS
By Walter Crane

THE ART OF WALTER CRANE

A judge of no mean capacity, when asked recently what living English artist had disclosed the greatest versatility and originality, and had done most to disseminate a love of the beautiful among the masses, replied promptly, Walter Crane. Many who are wont to pass upon pictorial art by the rules of the schools, and accept or reject paintings according to the traditional principles of juries of admission to exhibitions, would perhaps not concur in this opinion. It is nevertheless a fact, that England has produced no more ardent devotee of art than Crane—no man who has worked more assiduously to popularize the cult of the beautiful, no man who has undertaken such different forms of art work, and been so uniformly successful in all that he has undertaken.

Oil-painter, water-colorist, decorator, designer, book illustrator, writer, socialist, he has from the outset of his long career worked indefatigably, not merely to give expression to a sense of the beautiful, which is almost if not quite unique in modern times, but to remove art from the sacred precincts of the galleries and academies, and to apply it in varied forms to those interests that lie close to daily life.

Crane's work is all pre-eminently artistic: it is direct, spontaneous; and conveys the impression of having been done with the greatest

ease. His invention is rich, and his beauty of line and color is of the kind that charms and captivates. What is more, his art is wholesome in the highest and best sense. Work so direct, spontaneous, and pure was accorded a hearty welcome in the earlier days of the artist's efforts, and it pleases to-day as it did then.

His art lacks the stilted, "manufactured" qualities that characterize so many of the exhibition pictures, and probably for that very



VIEW FROM MONTE PINCIO, ROME
By Walter Crane

reason Crane has not met special favor at the hands of the Royal Academy. It shows an utter absence of the made-to-order element, and is almost equally devoid of the hall-marks of the professional. It has scarcely a hint of modern studio life; quite as little is it suggestive of the common nature we see about us. A rich, exotic imagination dominates everything he has done. He creates his own world of beauty, and expresses it with a charm of line and color strictly individual, often whimsical, but always graceful—as no other English artist has done.

Beauty is his idol; he has no use for the stern, the repellant, the prosaic. He seeks in nature her loveliest forms, and weaves them into a tissue of symbolism in which decorative grace is ever in the ascendant. As a friend once expressed it, he has a fancy which seems always ready to flow with the abundance and variety of nature herself, not in her workaday, weary aspect, not with the straining for



DECORATIVE FRIEZES
By Walter Crane



ORMUZD AND AHRIMAN
By Walter Crane

beauty under difficulties (a sense which so often overshadows our art schools and studios), but as a bird sings, and as animals play when they are happy—in short, as a perfectly joyful expression of a natural condition.

The artist is in the truest sense a poet, and be it in book illustrations, in mural decorations, in designs for fabrics and wall-papers, or in pictures executed for framing purposes, one cannot fail to feel the poetry of his work. Two elements are ever present, the beautiful and the dramatic, and as a consequence, his work is always suffused with the charm of loveliness, and instinct with action, growth, and vitality. His pictures are never dead or lifeless; there is always some distinct action expressed, something is going on. His slightest sketch or decoration has thus a sense of movement, a sense of the dramatic in its happiest vein.

Grace, balance, originality, which so many artists strive for and fail in the striving, have ever been with him the commonplaces of his daily effort. These have given him a unique position among present-



AMOR VINCIT OMNIA
By Walter Crane

day artists. He has the instinct of harmonizing in an original manner, and a cleverness in inventing combinations of flat tint color, which admirably supplement the grace, strength, and quality of his lines.



THE SWAN MAIDENS
By Walter Crane

Thus, whatever be the idea he wishes to symbolize, whatever the dramatic incident he seeks to depict, however abstract the thought he wishes to put into pictorial form, his artistic expression is always agreeable. It is not the artistic expression that stirs, inspires: it is



LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

By Walter Crane

that which woos. There is no conscious effort manifest in his work, and however far-fetched the pictorial conceit, it seems to be devoid of the mechanics of art. So easy of execution is it, that it impresses one as being natural.

Crane is usually classed with the pre-Raphaelites, not less from his avowed acceptance of the principles these devoted painters sought to popularize than from his strenuous effort to continue the work which the pre-Raphaelite leaders had begun. Really he is the product of many influences, now being influenced by Japanese art, now by Renaissance, now by the English pre-Raphaelites, and now by the Greek marbles. On the subject of the influences which have shaped his career, and resulted in that definite and individual style which is known far and wide throughout Europe if not in America, Crane has himself spoken with authority, and it is as well here, perhaps, to use his own words. Said he some time ago in an interview:

"I was born to the trade; but I lost my father when I was only fourteen, and since then I have had pretty much to shift for myself. At that age W. J. Linton, seeing some of my youthful sketches, took me as a pupil, with a view to drawing on wood, and thus turned me toward illustrated work; and besides it was the work which passed through his hands that helped to give me, I suppose, the bent I afterwards followed in landscape and figurative design.

"Drawings of Rossetti, F. Sandys, and Sir F. Leighton, for instance—I well remember the impression those made on me. Then,

too, Blake's work fascinated me greatly. Ruskin, too, was one of the men who influenced me largely—Ruskin and the poets, counteracted later by Herbert Spencer and Darwin. And as regards temporary influences, I cannot forget what I owe to Burne-Jones and William Morris. I remember reading 'Modern Painters,' and being deeply moved by it, when I cannot have been more than fourteen years old.

"But I owe, perhaps, most of all to the South Kensington Museum. Like Blake, who 'thanked God he never was sent to school to be whipped into following the ways of a fool,' I am thankful that I never had any school training—which at the best means training under some stereotyped system. For a student with definite aims there is no exaggerating the value of the inexhaustible treasures at the South Kensington Museum. There are no better masters in art than are to be found there, and in the Phidian marbles or the Italian room at the National Gallery. I never had any systematic training in the school sense, and I certainly owe nothing to the Academy.

"I was proud of getting a picture exhibited there in 1862—it was 'The Lady of Shalot'—and as it was very favorably noticed in the *Times*, and I knew I could improve, I thought I was on the road to fortune. But though I tried and tried again, I never got a second picture accepted there till ten years later, and since Sir Coutts Lindsay opened the Grosvenor Gallery, I have troubled Burlington House no



THE BRIDGE OF LIFE
By Walter Crane

more. I exhibited chiefly in the First Water-Color Dudley Gallery from 1866 onwards, my work meeting ready acceptance by the juries.

"Landscape has always been one of my favorite occupations, and the public, which associates my name with 'Walter Crane Story

Books,' would be surprised, perhaps, to see my portfolios of landscape studies. But it is figurative art that I love best; one of my very earliest drawings is meant to represent Ormuzd and Ahriman, or the conflict of the Good and Evil Powers"—a bit of symbolism.

Born in 1835 in Liverpool, taught from early childhood by his father, who was a miniature-painter of ability, thoroughly drilled in the use of colors and in the principles of drawing, early apprenticed to Linton, the wood-engraver, a calling in which he acquired sureness and firmness of touch, later brought under the influences of which he speaks in the foregoing paragraphs, and withal a man literally imbued with the spirit of the beautiful, and a confirmed protester against many if not most of the methods current in the schools and academies, it is no wonder that Crane should have developed his art along the lines that have made him famous. To him art was not art unless it was beautiful, and a picture lacked at least one of the elements of a picture unless it was decorative. His love of symbolism gave him a natural predilection toward figurative art, and as a consequence, this element can be traced quite as readily in his designs as in his finished pictures.



THE WATER-LILY
By Walter Crane

The first efforts of the young artist foreshadowed his future career. He was only an art student when he exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1862, and the year following he executed his first book illustrations for "The New Forest." These book illustrations were even more a revelation to the English public for their peculiar grace and beauty than were those of Kate Greenaway, who recently died.



IN THE CLOUDS
By Walter Crane



So popular were they that there was an immediate demand for his work. From 1867 to 1876 he issued a series of "Picture Books," which in a sense were regarded as annual events. In 1877 he gave to the public his "Baby's Opera." Then followed "Baby's Banquet," "Mrs. Mundi," "Pan Piper," "Grimm's Household Stories," "First of May," "The Sirens Three," "Baby's Own Æsop," "Flora's Feast," "Queen Summer," "A Wonder Book," "The Old Garden," "Spenser's Faerie Queene," "The Shepherd's Calendar"; and in addition to these, as he acquired fame as an instructor, several works on the theory and practice of drawing, the most important of which are "Claims of Decorative Art," "Decorative Illustration of Books," "The Bases of Design," and "Line and Form," new editions of the last two volumes having been called for by students during the present year.



PEGASUS
By Walter Crane

Considering the remarkable quality of the drawings made for book illustration, the amount of this class of work done by Crane is simply enormous. It is all characterized by the types of manly and womanly beauty, the fluent lines, the poetic conceptions, and the unique whimsicalities which are associated with his name, and which are one of his chief glories. Indeed, it has been said that Crane's art appears to the best advantage on the printed page, and not in the formal frame.

Crane's ambition, however, would not permit him to limit himself to book work, and his pictures, exhibited at the Dudley Gallery from 1866 to 1882, won for him a generous meed of praise from all visitors. Many of these works, as "Renascence of Venus," "Fate of Persephone," "The Sirens Three," "Europa," "Freedom," "The Bridge of Life," "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," "Neptune's Horses," "The Swan Maidens," "England's Emblem," "Brittania's Vision," "The



EUROPA
By Walter Crane

World's Conquerors," and "A Stranger," many of which are herewith reproduced, are works so graceful in their execution, so apt in their symbolism, so strong and forceful in their drawing, so beautiful in their color schemes, so out of the beaten ruts of artistic effort, that they stand unique among the products of British art.

Many another canvas might be mentioned, but those enumerated will suffice in this brief record. It is only necessary to say that in all this work, be it illustrations, paintings, designs, decorations, pottery, or what not, runs the artist's characteristic method—original, potent, artistic.

Devoting himself thus to so many art interests, and working for so many years under pressure, Crane has incurred risks and encountered dangers which some of his warmest friends and admirers think



ENGLAND'S EMBLEM
By Walter Crane

have left their impress on his product. This adverse side may here be expressed in the words of a careful student of the artist's career.

"Every credit must be given to the artist for his enormous fecundity," says Percy Bate, "and the industry which enables him to accomplish so much; but hasty production, and especially overproduc-



THE BOOK OF FATE
By Walter Crane

tion (a fault that many think Walter Crane must plead guilty to), have manifold disadvantages. Grace of composition, skillful disposition of forms, draperies, and accessories, and flowing beauty of line, are such constant elements in his work that we accept them as a matter of course, and are not always duly grateful; but hurry begets carelessness, it results in draftsmanship that is not always irreproachable, and color that is not always happy; and though the artist has an uninterrupted flow of ideas, he cannot possibly carry them all to com-

pletion, however industrious he may be. There is a limit to the capacity of every art worker which he would do well to recognize.

"The consequence is, that although all painters may be said to repeat themselves more or less, in Walter Crane's case style is apt to degenerate into mannerism, the literary element is perhaps unduly

obtruded, and the decorative charm, which may well be an underlying constituent in all pictures, becomes the dominant element. These easel paintings, judged as such, are not altogether satisfying, though considered as decorations, they have without exception very great beauty and charm.

"The artist himself does not draw any hard-and-fast line between pictorial work and other work, and his practice is consistent with this attitude; but critics who do not care for allegory, who think that pictures should show relief and express atmospheric values, naturally say that compositions which lack these essentials, which depend upon their literary appeal and their pleasing arrangements of line, can only be considered as decora-



BACCHANTE
By Walter Crane

tive and not pictorial art. But, even if considered pictorially the artist's work does not appeal to all, it cannot be denied that decoratively Walter Crane's achievement is very fine, spirited, imaginative, well balanced, and thoroughly original."

Reference has been made to the fact that the English Royal Academy has been chary in its recognition of Crane's genius. Only twice in his long artistic career has he shown pictures at that institution, once in 1862, and again in 1872. To most of the academicians

Crane is only a decorator. It is true that his work lacks the monotony and pomposity of the Academy, and it is no less true that art like his or Morris's or de Morgan's, in generous influx, would add life and interest to the Academy's exhibitions.

Many years ago a round-robin was signed by all the art professors in Vienna, expressive of their admiration of his illustrations. Through one of the London masters of art the same judgment was verbally expressed by the Berlin professors. Possibly the staid academicians thought that Crane's toy-books and his fabric and paper designs, which cannot be dwelt upon in this article, were unimportant, and out of keeping with the dignity of the time-honored institution in which they were enrolled.

The fact is, that Crane, conscious of his ability to produce beautiful things, has not disdained to apply his art to the common uses of daily life, and to put it in such form as to gladden the hearts of the greatest possible number, young and old. Who shall say that art such as this lacks dignity and importance? Or who shall say that the artist has not been devoting his abilities to as noble a cause as the painter who laboriously works out a figure subject or a bit of landscape which is exhibited for a day and as soon forgotten?

RALPH E. MORELAND.



STUDY FOR A PICTURE
By Walter Crane